

# Ravalli County Right To Farm & Ranch Board

215 South 4<sup>th</sup> St, Suite G  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
406-375-6611

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Ravalli County Commissioners  
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January 8, 2007

Montana State Farm Service Agency  
Randy Johnson,  
P.O. Box 670  
Bozeman, MT 59771-0670

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Ravalli County Right to Farm & Ranch Board is very concerned about the proposed closure of the Ravalli County FSA Office.

Agriculture in Ravalli County is an extremely important aspect of the quality of life that is so important to the residents (both new and long established) of the Bitter Root valley. This importance was affirmed in the November election when the county residents passed a \$10 million open lands bond to aid in the preservation of open agricultural lands.

Ravalli County has experienced tremendous growth over the past two decades, growth that has consumed about 50,000 acres of agricultural land, and this growth is projected to continue in the foreseeable future.

The conversion of AG land in Ravalli County is often driven by frustration with the difficulties of farming and ranching in the face of escalating land values. Closure of the Ravalli County FSA office will only add to the frustration and financial burden of many of our remaining 1,300 plus agricultural producers.

Another concern is the loss of synergy with the other agencies that share facilities with the FSA. The ability of producers to have a central location in Ravalli County for efficient dealings with the FSA, NRCS, Bitterroot Conservation District, and RC&D is crucial. It will be very detrimental to agriculture in Ravalli County if this ability is lost.

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Missoula is not an agricultural trade center and frankly is not the place many producers wish to travel to. Requiring Ravalli County producers from the south end of the county to commute to Missoula to do business with FSA will often result in the loss of an entire day for the producer, as the round trip may well exceed 160 miles.

The Ravalli County FSA serves 1318 farms, nearly twice the number of farms served in Missoula and Mineral counties combined. The Ravalli County FSA disperses average yearly payments of \$491,736 which is \$237,800 more than the combined Missoula - Mineral county office. The proposed consolidation of offices will not result in better service to the producers of Missoula and Mineral counties but will result in a burden and decrease in service provided to Ravalli County producers.

The closure of the Ravalli County FSA office could be the first step on a slippery slope. It will result in the loss of synergy with the other federal agencies that share the current facility, which could lead to the eventual loss of the other federal agency offices in Ravalli County.

For all the reasons presented here, we are asking that you please remove the Ravalli County FSA Office from consideration for consolidation with the Missoula Office.

Sincerely,

Ravalli County Right to Farm & Ranch Board

Dan Huls  
Chairman

CC Federal and State Representatives  
Ravalli County Commissioners  
FSA State Committee  
Ravalli County FSA Committee  
Governor Brian Schweitzer